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ÇËSHITJE TË SIGURISË *Security Issues*

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Albanian Foreign Policy Journal Interview

THE FUNCTIONING OF DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, RULE OF LAW AND MARKET ECONOMY ARE ONGOING CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACIES

(An exclusive interview with Tom Ridge for the journal Security Issues)

Interview with Tom Ridge

Born August 26, 1945, in Pittsburgh's Steel Valley, Governor Ridge was raised in a working-class family in veterans' public housing in Erie. He earned a scholarship to Harvard, graduating with honors in 1967. After his first year at The Dickinson School of Law, he was drafted into the U.S. Army, where he served as an infantry staff sergeant in Vietnam, earning the Bronze Star for Valor, the Combat Infantry Badge and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. After returning to Pennsylvania, he earned his law degree and was in private practice before becoming assistant district attorney in Erie County. Tom Ridge was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1982 and was overwhelmingly re-elected by Pennsylvania voters five times. Throughout his political career, he has never lost an election. Tom Ridge was twice elected Governor of Pennsylvania. He served as the state's 43rd governor from 1995 to 2001. Governor Ridge's aggressive technology strategy helped fuel the state's advances in economic development, education, health care and the environment. On October 8, 2001, prior to being Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge served as the first Assistant to the President for Homeland Security. Following the tragic events of September 11th, President Bush asked then-Governor Ridge to come to Washington to develop and coordinate a comprehensive national strategy to strengthen protections against terrorist threats and attacks in the United States. His first duties included standing up the Office of Homeland Security and the Homeland Security Council. Tom Ridge became the nation's first Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security on January 24, 2003. The creation of the country's 15th Cabinet Department marked the largest reorganization of government since the Truman administration and another call to service for the former soldier, congressman and governor of Pennsylvania. After more than 25 years in public service, Tom Ridge now consults on a range of issues, including security, international relations, economic development, civil institution building, technology, education and other matters that encompass his diverse portfolio.

In the opinion of Secretary Tom Ridge what are the challenges to Albania in the sphere of security?

Like many nations, particularly young democracies, challenging security issues center on border management issues and criminal activities, such as drug trade, human trafficking and organized crime. For some time, law enforcement has been low and weak, while the

justice system suffered from endemic corruption. Albania has for many years been a transit country as well as a safe haven for criminals, corruption and related illegal activities. However, in the past two years organized crime has suffered a strong blow as major criminal groups in the country have been brought to justice and the links between crime and politics have been cut. This has brought some much-needed stabilization to the region. Also, a culture of cooperation within and between foreign partner law enforcement and intelligence agencies has improved, which has enabled law enforcement to move more effectively against Albania's criminal element in and outside the country. Additionally, more transparency and other reforms are having an impact in decreasing corruption, with many more good efforts in this direction underway.

Border security has become a critical challenge for all nations, including my own. In Albania, recently implemented border control measures have increased security for people and goods that travel across the country's border. As these measures are strengthened, they will enable authorities to identify better those who attempt to enter the country for criminal purposes. Additionally, government reforms aimed at citizen registration and identification systems will enhance the institutions of democracy and, most importantly, create an environment where citizens of Albania can participate in fair elections. So while Albania faces challenges, significant progress is being made to address those challenges, which signals a more secure Albania going forward.

According to Secretary Ridge, what is the message of the Riga Summit to Adriatic Charter countries? May the 2008 Washington Summit turn into a success story for each of these countries in receiving of invitations to join NATO?

The message of the Riga Summit on the Adriatic Charter countries is one of hope. A global community is undoubtedly strengthened by those countries that want to better the lives of their citizens. There is a hopefulness among the Alliance and, as a result, a willingness to help the citizens and governments of Albania, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia meet the responsibilities of NATO membership. The Alliance is looking for countries who meet uniform standards but who are also able to contribute constructively to Euro-Atlantic security and stability. I think there is reason for hope regarding the 2008 Summit. Already we have seen successes that are worth noting. International peacekeeping, cooperation with other nations in a difficult security climate and efforts to advance regional cooperation have been more than welcomed and are indeed necessary in today's international fight against terrorism. The principled and improved conduct of Albania's Parliamentary elections in 2005 gained favorable attention – as did measures to embrace and defend the rule of law and battle organized crime. Croatia has also made a good impression, given its full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and success in advancing political, economic, rule of law and defense reforms. As for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in 2006 it too conducted improved Parliamentary elections. Its commitment and efforts to further embed economic, political, defense and judicial reforms are promising. In the Adriatic 3, significant progress is being made on many fronts to facilitate entry into NATO so that these countries can ultimately become full, honorable and contributing members. Hopefully, the 2008 Summit will acknowledge

the significant progress that has been made toward meeting the requirements for NATO membership.

In the opinion of the Honorable Tom Ridge, what is the role of civil society in reforming and governance of the security sector? Are there any limits to their involvement? How can authorities and institutions in the security sector best cooperate with civil society?

Far and wide across the globe, we have seen the important and influential role of civil societies in the context of their own governments. Citizenship within any country and within the global community carries a responsibility. It is because citizens have advocated safety for their families, fairness in their judicial systems and economic opportunity in their homelands that advances have been made. We know this in America – as we have been propelled by the voices of those who advocated right-to-vote movements and equal rights for persons of any race, religion, gender and creed. In the aftermath of 9/11, our citizens very appropriately advocated for answers to many questions: What is government doing to secure the country? Who is securing the workplace? Who is keeping our children safe at school? And, a question that we encouraged our citizens to ask, what can I do to help?

Albania's civil society has the potential to fulfill a vital role in advancing the priority issues of its government, including Albanian security. That role can be achieved by strengthening the dialogue and communication between citizens and government. Currently, NGOs operating in the security sector are very few, while those focusing on the rule of law are mainly constrained to public awareness activities. All this can and has begun to change. A strengthening of the NGO sector and greater accountability and transparency by government institutions are two central ways that we are beginning to see a culture of cooperation between civil society and government. Albania has begun to see that level of exchange. Some civil society organizations have been influential in pressing the government to improve the rule of law and law enforcement as well as promote policies and programs to improve the country's social and economic order. Those are positive steps. More are to be encouraged. Open communication between people and their government is a defining characteristic of democratic societies. It yields new ideas, trust, progress, constructive change – and a positive climate in which all parties can debate tough issues that can yield agreement, outcomes and progress.

“The defense of a country's political sovereignty does not necessarily coincide with the defense of a country's territorial integrity”. What Secretary Ridge's view of this statement? What does this imply for the security and stability in South East Europe?

A country's primary obligation to defend its sovereignty, in my judgment, must include a sustained commitment to defend its territorial integrity. Any national effort designed to secure the safety of its citizens and the protection of its civic, economic and social order is incomplete without an effective border management system that legitimizes and protects the lawful flow of people, goods and services. Many of the challenges confronting the emerging democracies and developing economies of South East Europe

are further complicated by historical factors and the realities of a globally connected, competitive world. While each country must and will design its own course to reach its political, social and economic goals, regional collaboration will be essential to fulfilling those aspirations as well. Mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity is absolutely critical to the stability and success of any regional group of neighbors. Cross-border criminal activity and illegal immigration have a slow, corrosive effect upon a country's sovereignty, which is why mutual cooperation is integral to any national initiative in this effort. Collaborative development of complementary border management and national identification systems will help advance many of the goals shared by individual countries in the region, including integration, stability, security and economic prosperity.

What should be the advice or principles Albanian state and society has to follow to improve the efficiency of the security and development of the country?

A continued fight against crime and corruption, further strengthening of institutions and a commitment to good governance are still the main goals Albania should strive to achieve. Free and open elections, greater economic incentives and a stronger internal infrastructure will revitalize Albania and the lives of its citizens. Free and secure societies make conditions more difficult for terrorist and criminal activities, and thus I would encourage more of the reforms we have seen taking shape – such as border management measures and efforts to implement a premier ID system. The country's challenges are still to ensure a functioning democracy, a consistent rule of law and a free market economy. But those are challenges that any democracy knows are ongoing. They are challenges that must be continually monitored, nurtured and changed as times and circumstances change.

I have every confidence that by protecting and furthering such principles, Albania's progress and development will become sustainable. And with continued commitment, what is a young democracy in Albania will flourish and grow to be a successful, enterprising and contributing member of the global community. Those of us who have a strong affection for the Albanian people would welcome that achievement.